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ABSTRACT

In 1998, the Kentucky General Assembly called for a new testing system known as the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) to determine how much children are learning in school. This brochure tells the basics about Kentucky's system of public education. The "Core Content" document describes what students should know and be able to do in each grade. A major part of CATS is the set of Core Content Tests, given every year in every school to measure the academic progress of the students. These tests use multiple-choice, essay-like questions and writing samples to measure how well students know a subject and what they can do with what they know. Kentucky's public school system holds schools accountable for their students' continued progress. Under CATS, each school will have a customized growth chart to show the level of student achievement expected each year until 2014. Schools get rewarded for sufficient improvement, for passing certain milestones along the way, and for being "pace setters" in the top five percent of all schools. Schools that are not doing well enough will not be offered state assistance until they fall below a certain point on their own customized growth chart. Kentucky has a number of support programs for families, students, teachers, and schools to help students meet high standards. (SLD)

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ED 438 290

EDUCATION In Kentucky

How We Achieve

Basic facts about Kentucky's new testing system . . .

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Kentucky Department of Education
Wilmer S. Cody, Commissioner

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In 1998, the Kentucky General Assembly called for a new testing system to check every year on how much our children are learning in school. The new system is called The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System, or CATS.

- CATS was developed during the past year by the Kentucky Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education, with the help of thousands of Kentuckians – employers, educators, legislators, parents – and with the help of national testing experts. Every teacher had a chance to participate.

- Kentucky's system is based on the belief that all children can learn at high levels, if they are given enough time and opportunity, and if they put forth enough effort.

This brochure tells the basics about Kentucky's system of public education. It's really pretty simple: We get together and decide what students should know, we test to see whether they know it, then we reward the schools that are doing a good job — and find ways to help the schools that aren't.

The main parts of the testing system:

- **Kentucky's "Core Content."** This is a document that describes what students should know and be able to do in each grade. It sets high standards for our students, and helps teachers plan instruction.

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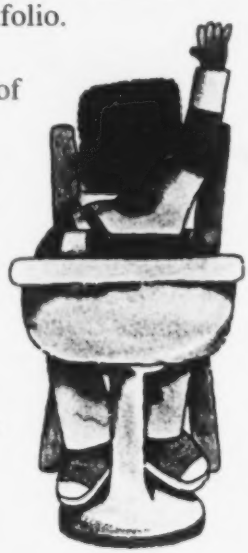
- **The Kentucky Core Content Tests.** These tests measure how well students have mastered the core content – how well our schools, teachers and students are meeting the high standards we have set. Students also take a national basic skills test, and develop a writing portfolio.

- **Accountability.** This is a way of using all the test scores, and some other key facts, to tell schools, parents and taxpayers how well each school is doing — and also to help schools keep on improving. Schools that do well on the tests get rewards; schools that don't do so well get help so they can do better.



How these parts fit together:

We decide what students should learn

Kentucky has high expectations for what students should know and be able to do. These expectations are spelled out for teachers and parents in the academic core content. The Core Content tells what students must know for the test components of CATS. This document has been widely distributed throughout the state. Teachers use it to plan what they teach.

We find out whether they learned it

A major part of CATS is a set of tests, the Kentucky Core Content Tests, which are given every year in every school to measure the academic progress of their students. The tests use multiple-choice, essay-like questions and writing samples to measure how well students know a subject and what they can do with what they know. Kentucky also uses dropout rates, attendance figures, retention rates (how many students get held back), and successful transition to adult life,

to make up the formula for school improvement. In addition, a national basic skills test allows us to compare the achievement of Kentucky students to the achievement of children throughout the country.

The state tests tell parents and schools how students are performing and where they need help. They are also used to measure how effective schools are, and to hold them accountable for doing a good job. And, teachers use the test results to make decisions about classroom instruction.

We reward the schools that succeed and help the schools that don't

Kentucky's public school system holds schools accountable for continued progress. Under CATS, each school will have a customized growth chart to show the level of student achievement that is expected each year until the year 2014. Schools should have a score of 100 (on a scale of 140) by that year.

Schools get rewarded for sufficient improvement toward that goal; for passing certain milestones along the way; and for being "pace setters" in the top five percent of all schools.

Schools that aren't doing quite well enough won't get rewards, but they will not be offered state assistance until they fall below a certain point on their own customized growth chart.

Schools that fall below the "assistance line" on their growth chart will be eligible for state assistance.

All along the way, we support families, students, teachers and schools

Kentucky has a lot of support programs. Here are a few:

The Preschool Program - Children who are three years old and who have disabilities, and children who are four and qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, can attend preschool. Preschool is free, and it helps children start school ready to learn.

The Primary Program - Students ages five through nine can learn and progress at their own pace in Kentucky's Primary Program. It encourages schools to educate children based on their abilities rather than their age.

Training for Teachers - Kentucky provides the training teachers need to teach better, and new programs to help teachers are on the way. Every Kentucky educator will have more and more opportunities to improve skills and gain new knowledge.

Extended School Services - Kentucky's schools have the money to give struggling students extra help – before or after school, on weekends, during the summer, or any other time that works for the student and the student's family.

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers - Many schools have centers that provide services to students and their families. The goal is to be sure that all children can overcome barriers to learning. The

centers work to improve communication between families and the school and increase parent involvement. They also help families find health care, housing and refer families to other social services.

Parent Involvement - It's a fact that schools and students do better when parents are involved. Kentucky's schools want and need parents to be involved in school by serving on committees, tutoring students and working in the classrooms.

Why do we need all this testing?

If we don't measure results, we can't tell the difference between success and failure. If we can't recognize success, we can't duplicate it. If we can't recognize failure, we can't correct it. So, we set high standards for performance. We provide training and support for meeting those standards. We check to see how well the standards are being met. We reward those who meet the high standards, and figure out ways to help those who don't.

Want To Learn More?

These are just the basics. For more detail, contact us. Ask for a copy of these publications: *What We Believe About Educating Kentucky's Children* and *Testing in Kentucky*. Also, visit the Department of Education Website at http://www.kde.state.ky.us or contact the Department's Division of Public Information at 500 Mero Street, 19th Floor, Frankfort, KY 40601 (502) 564-3421; 1-800-533-5372 (toll-free in Kentucky).

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